



NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

BISHOP ASBURY AND NEW JERSEY METHODISM

by

Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe

It is a sobering fact that our first Bishop was never turned on by New Jersey. We Jerseyans never come off too well in his journal. As late as 1811 he wrote a sarcastic little note in his journal: "I am unknown in Jersey, and ever shall be, I presume. After forty years labour we have not ten thousand members." Actually, we had barely 6,000 members in the whole state in 1811. Even the New England Conference had twice as many members at a time when it was thought the Congregationalists had that area all sewed up!

Not that Bishop Asbury didn't try to crack New Jersey. Between the first time he preached within the boundaries of our Northern New Jersey Conference (1772) and the last time (1815) he made at least 60 preaching tours through the state. He could hardly avoid us. New Jersey--then as now--was a highway between the two great urban centers of Philadelphia and New York. Methodism along the routes traveled by Asbury and his colleagues was strengthened by their regular visits and preaching. When, in 1773 the preachers gathered for the first of a continuing line of annual conferences there were only ten preachers assigned to a single circuit covering our whole state. Actually, most of the preaching points were in South Jersey. The next year the state was divided into two circuits--a northern circuit centering around Trenton and a southern circuit centering around Burlington. Progress was slow; converts few; new churches even fewer, especially in the northern part of the state. But things would get worse before they would get better!

During the next few years revival met revolution. American Methodism, and especially New Jersey Methodism, almost died in the midst of this political revolution. The first churches in our conference were formed as the clouds of taxation without representation and royal oppression gathered on the horizon. When Britain's conflict with the colonies broke out into war in 1775, John Wesley's social conscience moved him to support the early pleas of the colonists for liberty and justice. But when the American demand for liberty was changed to the demand for independence, Wesley's inbred loyalty to crown and empire, and his doctrine of nonresistance to "the powers that be" turned him against the rebels. In the six years of the Revolutionary War Wesley penned and published no fewer than thirteen royalist tracts and open letters. The most famous was his CALM ADDRESS TO OUR AMERICAN COLONIES published in London in the summer of 1775. By year's end a dozen different editions were published on both sides of the Atlantic. Infant Methodism almost died. Methodists--preachers and layfolk alike--were branded Tories, traitors. Methodism in many areas--especially war-torn New Jersey--was forced underground. At the end of the battle of Lexington and Concord in the Spring of 1775 Methodists in New Jersey numbered about 300. By year's end rolls were reduced by half. Few Methodists advertized the fact that they belonged to Wesley's clan. All of Wesley's preachers went home--except one, Francis Asbury, who was forced to hide out in an attic in Delaware for the better part of two years.

By the fall of 1780 the war was almost over and Asbury felt safe enough to leave his wartime sanctuary and begin his supervisory tours of the circuits. He continued to appoint preachers to the Jersey circuits, hoping for the best. From time to time, on his way north or south, he would stop by, preaching to the people and attempting to lift the spirits of the weary preachers.

The office of Bishop in our church is inseparably connected with the personality of Francis Asbury. He is the man who molded the office. In a manner of speaking, Asbury

lives today in the institution of Episcopacy among us latter day United Methodists. In the early days there was lively debate about our newly formed church and its ministers and bishops, especially with the Presbyterians and the Church of England, our mother church. Presbyterians, of course, did not have bishops and scoffed at ours. The Church of England (now the Episcopal Church) had bishops but felt ours was only a pale imitation of theirs. Asbury claimed, in effect, ours is better than yours! To Asbury's mind our Lord's apostles were the first bishops and they were circuit riders. Hence the chief mark of an apostle (i.e. Bishop) is Itinerancy. Asbury agreed with the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics that bishops were the successors of the apostles, but unlike them claimed that bishops should be itinerant evangelists. It was not until the second century, said he, that bishops became identified with one area or diocese, that --to use the technical Methodist term--they "located." This location of bishops, in Asbury's mind, marks the fall of the episcopate from its former glory. So, far from regarding the Church of England episcopacy as complete with the Methodist a pale imitation of it, Asbury believed the exact reverse to be true. Authentic episcopacy, lost for centuries, had now been restored in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore in the United States of America in 1784. Like the Apostles, and unlike the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian bishops, Methodists bishops are itinerants.

While itinerancy was essential to the nature of authentic episcopacy, celibacy was a close second for Asbury. It may be embarrassing to realize that our first bishop was not only a bachelor, but even defended celibacy and urged his preachers to imitate him--as he imitated St. Paul--in pursuing a celibate life. It was not possible, he thought, to carry out the functions of authentic episcopacy or ministry with a wife and family. The person who marries must assume family obligations; he cannot really fulfill the obligations of itinerancy. Asbury is not opposed to marriage for layfolk, but he is convinced that it is not a suitable state for Methodist preachers or bishops. His journal is full of wry comments about preachers he has lost either to the devil or to women. Family life meant location, the settled parish, Presbyterianism in church government if not in doctrine!

Marriage is honourable in all (he wrote in his journal) but to me it is a ceremony awful as death. Well may it be so, when I calculate we have lost the traveling labors of 200 of the best men in America, or the world, by marriage and consequent location.

No one in Christian history--not even St. Paul--had a circuit comparable to Asbury. Despite hazards and difficulties of rough country like New Jersey, Asbury persisted in making his episcopal rounds until the very end of his life. The mark of apostolic succession, some wag once noted, is APOSTOLIC SUCCESS. Who had more right to be called Bishop? An Anglican bishop sipping port in his palace after a leisurely afternoon of calling in the salons of his wealthy parishioners, or the rugged son of a Staffordshire gardener crossing rivers and mountains on a pony in order to preach at some remote farmhouse in New Jersey? The sign of apostolicity is to be UNDER ORDERS not merely IN them!

At the cornerstone laying ceremony for a new church in our conference in 1796 in a town which bears his name, our pioneer Bishop invited the congregation to sing Isaac Watts hymn "The Foundation Stone", which has long since disappeared from our hymnal.

Behold the sure foundation stone  
Which God in Zion lays;  
To build our heavenly hopes upon  
and His eternal praise.

(Isaac Watts' paraphrase  
of Psalm 118, vv. 22-23)

New Jersey Methodism is built on the "sure foundations" which "God in Zion Laid" through his servant Francis Asbury. From hasty visits spread over a busy lifetime slowly but surely Methodism prospered--even in New Jersey! Asbury's administrative gifts and superb strategy were only part of the reason.

Asbury and the Methodists of his generation believed in the residence and presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the faithful. They abhorred the horrors of sin and of man's inhumanity to man. So they sobered the drunken, fought off human slavery, gave dignity to labor, and made thrift, industry and sobriety practical virtues in a debauched society. Our founding fathers and mothers in the faith reshaped history--not because they set out to reshape history, but because they meant to haul persons up short before the utter glory of God in judgment and mercy, to help them see themselves and their neighbors in a new light, and to devote themselves to creative but unostentatious service. So closely are we joined to our founding fathers and mothers that they have to depend on us for the outworkings of their dreams and visions--just as we must depend on them for the foundations on which we build.

A new future is opening before us all--a difficult future, that is already beginning to daunt even the most optimistic of old-style progressives in church and society. But in Christian perspective it matters less whether the future is hopeful or grim, but whether, having read off the record of the past, we're prepared to reenlist for another tour of duty, to live, to work, to die by the faith that wrote the record of the past and has yet more to write on history's pages!

#### LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST - Awards to be presented during 1979 Conference

Four local churches - Cokesbury, Demarest, Englewood, and Haverstraw - have submitted histories of their churches published during the calendar year 1979 for our sixth annual LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY RECOGNITION CONTEST. Two awards will be presented during the 1979 meeting of the Annual Conference in June.

If your church has published a history of your local church in 1978, we urge you to enter it in this year's contest now. Large or small, pamphlet or cloth bound, mimeographed or printed, all histories printed during 1978 are eligible. Each history will become part of the Conference's permanent collection. MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N.J. 07940 by February 1, 1979.

#### RETIRED AND RETIRING PASTORS

Have you made your tape of reminiscences and your very best sermon for the Conference Archives? If not, contact Paul Spiecker, Hawthorne, for details. Phone: 427-0725.

#### PAYMENT FOR COMMISSION'S RECENT PUBLICATION DUE

We respectfully request all those churches and/or pastors who received two copies of the CIVIL WAR DIARIES OF JAMES B. FAULKS and THE PERSONAL DIARIES OF JOHN SUMMERFIELD COIT by Henry L. Lambdin at conference time, June 5, 1978, and who have not paid the \$3 requested at that time, to please remit the \$3 to: The Rev. Paul E. Spiecker  
452 Lafayette Ave.  
Hawthorne, N.J. 07506

#### TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY

A small exhibit of Asbury memorabilia from the collection of Drew University is available on request for use at special celebrations in local churches. The exhibit includes several mounted prints and photographs, a set of ordination certificates signed by our first Bishop, along with a pair of spectacles he wore. When used with historical items from a local congregation, this makes an attractive addition to an anniversary or other historical observation. Contact Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N.J. 07940. Telephone: 377-3000, Ext. 243.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
TO BE MOVED TO DREW UNIVERSITY

MADISON - A recent decision to move the national archives of the United Methodist Church to Drew University means, in the estimate of a University librarian, "the creation here at Drew of an unsurpassed national Methodist research center".

Space for the archives has been included in Drew library expansion and refurbishing plans that carry a price tag of approximately \$8 million. In proposing the archival transfer, University officials estimated that the new library, including facilities for the archives, would be ready by 1981.

Final confirmation of the move awaits approval of an enlarged budget for the archives by the general Church's Council on Finance and Administration which meets later this year.

The vote to relocate came late last month at the annual meeting of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History at Lake Junaluska, N.C., where the facility presently housing the archives is overflowing.

Drew offered the Commission 30,000 square feet of custom-built, rent-free space, including vault storage, support services, museum and display areas, offices for its five-member staff, and shelving in library stack and archival storage areas; a system of fire and theft protection, including nighttime security patrols; payment of all capital maintenance costs and a variety of cost-cutting resource-maximizing cooperative arrangements with the University library, whose own collection of Methodist materials is already among the most comprehensive in the world.

Under Drew's proposal, said Dr. Rowe, the Commission would pay custodial maintenance and utility costs on a pro-rata basis.

While the Church archives would be housed for the most part in the present Rose Memorial Library, specially refurbished, some portion would probably involve the new library structure, he noted. The new structure will be located immediately to the rear (south) of the present library and linked with it at every floor level by a galleria - a glass-enclosed complex of bridges and stairways.

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

ANDOVER      Andover congregation recently celebrated its 125th anniversary with a special evening worship service. Former ministers attended and Bishop White preached.

ARCOLA        The Arcola Church observed its 135th anniversary on Sunday May 14, 1978, with a day of celebration. The Church was organized on March 14, 1843, just three years after a group of people from "Red Mills", as the area was then called, got together and installed seats in a barn owned by Edward Force on his 60 acre farm, where their first worship service was held. Bishop White preached the anniversary sermon assisted by District Superintendent Hargrove. Dr. Rowe of Drew University delivered an historical address following lunch. The Rev. Harry A. Stratton is the 70th pastor to serve this church in its 135 year history.

LYNDHURST    As a part of their observance of Heritage Sunday on May 21, the Lyndhurst Church celebrated the 45th anniversary of the completion of its educational building. Many former members and friends of the church returned for the event which included a buffet luncheon at noon and a special anniversary service in the afternoon. During the service the education wing was

officially named the "Exler-Messing Building" in honor of two veteran members of the Church. The Rev. Robert O. Bryant is pastor.

- NEW CITY      The Methodists of New City held a camp meeting here in 1860. Contemporary United Methodists repeated that. In connection with their 150th anniversary as a congregation, a "Commemorative Camp Meeting" was held September 9-10. Arranged by the UMYF, the camp was held on the church grounds--the same spot on which the 1860 encampment was held. Other anniversary events included a September 24 musical history service; an October 15 "Roots Night." with an address by Dr. Rowe of Drew held in their former church building; a parade on October 21; and on October 22 a service of mortgage-burning and dedication of the parish's new church building by Bishop White.
- NUTLEY        With candles in hand parishioners of Bishop Vincent Church in Nutley gathered in a large tent on a Wednesday evening this summer to celebrate the church's 150th anniversary. It was a reenactment of a Methodist Camp meeting that was so popular in the 1820's when the church was founded. A church picnic was held prior to the service on the church grounds where the tent was erected. In addition to hearing four sermons from different speakers, the congregation sang old hymns and spirituals. Dr. Rowe of Drew University addressed an anniversary dinner meeting in October.
- WYCKOFF       The congregation of Grace Church celebrated July 1978 as "Anniversary Month" marking the 110 years since its founding in Paterson. A highlight of the event was the celebration of Holy Communion using the 1868 ritual of the church. The Communion table and ware used in the old Paterson church, which was destroyed by fire, were used. Forty persons who were members of the old church before its relocation in 1962 were honored. Dr. Clark Hunt, dean of the Conference Cabinet, and the Rev. Richard W. Capron, a former member who entered the ordained ministry, preached at special services.
- OTHERS?       CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE is a regular column in our newsletter. Won't you share your plans or report on historic celebrations in your church? Please contact the editor and give us your story!

#### ACCESSIONS TO CONFERENCE ARCHIVES

Newark, DeGroot Methodist Episcopal Church: Constitution of Opportunity Club, 1910; Souvenir of 18th anniversary, 1897; History 1861-1906; 50th anniversary brochure, 1911.; plus large scrapbook. Gift of Mrs. Lorraine Gregory of Shohola, Pa.

Fort Lee: Deeds, bonds and mortgages, 1824-1870.

**ORDER THESE RESOURCES  
FROM YOUR  
NORTHERN NEW JERSEY ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY**

Because postal rates have increased so greatly,  
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**GUIDLINES FOR LOCAL CHURCH HISTORIANS AND  
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**A SHORT HISTORY OF THE METHODISTS, by Jesse Lee**

A facsimile reprint of the First Edition of the  
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**THE CIVIL WAR DIARIES OF JAMES B. FAULKS and  
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narrative version written by

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publication date, June 5, 1978

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